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Review of Convent Times: A Social History in the Foundations of Modern Spain, by A. Atienza

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Tiempos de conventos. Una historia social de las fundaciones en la España moderna. By Ángela Atienza. Pp. 291. Madrid: Marcial Pons Historia/Universidad de La Rioja, 2008. 978 84 96487 31 4
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Ángela Atienza's *Tiempos de conventos* is an important contribution to the study of monasticism and society in early modern Spain. She analyses the creation of almost 2,400 convents and monasteries in Spain in the period from 1474 to 1800. Her central contention is that these institutions were centres of power. Drawing on an impressive archival base and a survey of existing scholarship (albeit almost exclusively in Spanish), she argues that a full understanding of the socio-political landscape of early modern Spain is incomplete without an examination of how the crown, nobles and local elites used religious foundations to fashion and propagate their power.

Atienza devotes the first half of the book to an examination in turn of royal, noble and non-noble foundations. The chapter on royal foundations proficiently notes the differences in the reigns of various monarchs – with Charles I's activity, for example, paling in comparison to that of his predecessors, Isabel and Ferdinand, and his son's grand accomplishment at El Escorial. This chapter, however, is a bit short on analysis of what the crown gained from such efforts. In contrast, the chapters on the institutions founded by nobles and local elites contain excellent examinations of how the creation of convents and monasteries allowed these individuals and families to enhance their power and prestige. The closing chapters of the book also demonstrate Atienza's keen analysis as she isolates several intriguing subtopics within her larger study. Among these is the phenomenon of women founding religious institutions for other women. She also examines cases of conflict and resistance, originating with town councils and the secular clergy that surrounded the foundation of some houses. Focusing on issues such as these adds complexity to her analysis and conclusions. This is a solid and very thorough account of the creation of religious houses in Spain

in the early modern period. In a field that is dominated by local studies, studies of single institutions or particular religious orders, the chronological and geographical scope of Atienza's project is welcome and impressive. Although the depth of the analysis is a bit uneven over the course of the entire volume, Atienza has none the less provided a sophisticated interpretation of how the founders of convents and monasteries used these institutions to wield power and influence. In so doing, she has made an important contribution not only to the field of religious history but also to the study of early modern Spanish society.

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